

14. OBSERVATIONS OF SQUATTING POSTURE
ADOPTED BY *CHLAMYDOTIS UNDULATA* (JAQUIN)

(With one plate)

As is well known, the houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) is a species inhabiting open spaces with light ground cover from where it can see all round. It is alert and wary, preferring to trust its legs to escape from danger. However, it takes to its wings when hard pressed. At times, it squats low and freezes on the ground to escape detection. Before doing this, the bird warily walks on, moving the head and neck backwards and forwards a few times, and then suddenly squats down flush with the ground behind a clump of grass, other vegetation or next to a stone, and sometimes on the bare ground where from a distance it appears like a lump of dried-up cattle dung. Some authorities state that while taking up this posture to hide, the houbara stretches out its neck along the ground. Be that as it may, I have observed this behaviour many times, but never have I seen this species stretch its neck out along the ground. All the individuals I had seen freezing folded their neck backwards towards the body with their neck and head pressed down almost between the shoulders.

Considering the practical aspects of this instinctive behaviour, if a bird were to stretch its neck forward, the colour of the neck, being lighter than that of the upper parts of the houbara's body, would be quite conspicuous and so would not escape the sharp vision of a predator, particularly a raptor, whereas the neck bent backwards towards the body provides better camouflage. Besides, it would not be convenient or easy for an individual to crawl along the ground in a crouching position, as this bird often does, with an outstretched neck. While squatting doggo against a clump of vegetation, the houbara constantly keeps its sharp, wary eye on the pursuer and moves round, keeping the clump between itself and the intruder, whereas with a raptor hovering above it keeps absolutely still. I have observed the same habit of squatting low in *Ardeotis nigriceps* and *Sypheotides indica*.

April 20, 2000

M.K. HIMMATSINHJI

Jubilee Ground

Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat, India.

15. A BREEDING COLONY OF RIVER TERN *STERNA AURANTIA*,
SMALL PRATINCOLE *GLAREOLA LACTEA*
AND RED-WATTLED LAPWING *VANELLUS INDICUS* AT LONAVLA

INS Shivaji at Lonavla in Maharashtra has a sprawling 400 hectare campus surrounded by hills of various heights. The hillocks around the plain campus were instrumental in creating a draining basin or rivulet. An artificial lake of about 1 sq. km with an islet of approximately 400 sq. m has been created by bunding the rivulet. The islet cannot be approached by any means and it is submerged in water during the rainy season from June to September every year.

About 500 river terns *Sterna aurantia*

breed on the islet in the company of small pratincoles *Glareola lactea* (100-120 individuals) and red-wattled lapwings *Vanellus indicus* (150-200 individuals). On enquiring, we were told that they are breeding on the islet since the early 1980s. In the evening of March 3, 2000, we observed hundreds of them incubating their eggs, some of them chasing invading crows.

During the monsoon months when the islet is submerged under water, the birds with their